

Small native fish numbers rise

The latest round of monitoring in Eckert Creek within the Katarapko floodplain near Berri has found increased numbers of several small-bodied native fish species.

Natural Resources South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Katfish Reach Wetland Ecologist Lara Suitor said the Eckert Creek and Katarapko Creek system had some of the most diverse habitat for native fish species.

“However, locks and weirs have created stable water levels, meaning native fish have been unable to follow their natural cues to move into the upper reaches to breed and spawn,” Ms Suitor said.

“Completion of the new log crossing regulator and fishway, and the removal of associated smaller barriers in the creeks now gives native fish ability to move more readily in response to changes in water level and water flow, which may promote breeding.

“The log crossing has been a significant barrier to the flow of water and movement of native fish in the upper reaches of the system for many decades.”

The original crossing was constructed out of large hollow tree logs placed across Eckert Creek, and then covered with dirt and gravel. This provided vehicle access across the creek to the stone weir and Katarapko Creek, but blocked water flow and fish movement in Eckert Creek.

Ms Suitor said the annual summer monitoring found increased numbers of native fish species such as unspoked hardyhead, carp gudgeon and Murray River rainbowfish in comparison to previous years.

“These small-bodied fish species are wetland opportunist species and will breed in response to an increase in water temperature and appropriate habitat conditions,” she said.

“The response we have recorded this summer may be the result of a localised breeding event due to good conditions.

“The removal of barriers and providing the fishway on the log crossing may also have facilitated the movement of these species throughout Eckert Creek.

“Fishways provide native fish with the flow, velocity and light conditions that they need to move naturally throughout the system.

“This is a promising outcome which demonstrates how barriers in systems such as this can impact on the movement of native fish.”

This year work on the main inlet of Eckert Creek (Bank J) will include an additional fishway and improved infrastructure to facilitate better water flows and fish movement into the system.

Ongoing monitoring will continue to determine the effectiveness of new fishways on the movement of native fish numbers and diversity.

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**Katfish
Reach**



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Katfish Reach is a community environmental rehabilitation group working in partnership with government to achieve a healthier and more productive aquatic and floodplain ecosystem that everyone can enjoy.

On-ground works are continuing through the project to achieve this aim, and the area will see many more environmental improvements over time, creating a productive and thriving National Park for the Riverland.

The Australian Government invested funding for the new log crossing regulator and fishway through the Riverine Recovery Project, a key component of South Australia's *Murray Futures* program.

Photo caption: Natural Resources SAMDB annual summer monitoring has found increased numbers of native fish species such as carp gudgeon pictured.

Photo caption: The original crossing was constructed out of large hollow tree logs placed across Eckert Creek, providing vehicle access to the stone weir and Katarapko Creek, but blocking water flow and fish movement.

